This Stately Home Surveys the City

By GINNIE BEARDSLEY

OLD-TIME CRAFTSMEN BUILT TO LAST

HALF-WAY UP Tattersal Drive in its first block east of Quadra, two stone pillars and the name Chorley House give entrance to a steeply winding private road leading to the very crown of a hill, and to its crowning glory: a sately home built of granite from the ground on which it stands.

Builders of this handsome home were an English-born spinster, Miss Lilian Kitchin, who realized a dream when she inherited money from her homeland; and a Scottish-born stonemason, Arthur Stewart, who also built seven other houses on the same street.

To Miss Kitchin, a strong character with definite ideas, goes the credit for the inspiration to have a home like the dignified ones she remembered in her childhood. To Mr. Stewart, whose father and grandfather were stonemasons before him, admiration is due for not only the cutting and laying of the stone, but also for making the builder's plans for the ambitious project, and for building the road over most difficult terrain.

Stone foundations rise around the high point of the property, with rocky outcroppings right beside the furnace, and the storey-and-a-half home crowns its setting in perfect harmony with the craggy rocks on which it is built. Commanding a view in a complete circle around Victoria, Chorley House is a fine example of the type of home built to last for generations. The very best of materials and all necessary time went to make it all that the owner dreamed of. In addition to the fine stone quarried and cut on the site, such materials as oak parquet flooring, the best of plate-glass, and even stained glass (including some in the basement) were used to make everything look exactly right.

Mr. Stewart had the assistance of other stonemasons in the city, including Arthur Coleman, who is alive today; and for plumbing and heating work called upon his brother Lawrence ("Lawrie") who only retired at 75, and is in good health today at 88.

One of three stone mason brothers from Kilmarnoch, Arthur Stewart did much to open up the land around the high Quadra and Lake Hill districts. In 1910, he finished his own stone and frame home, which stands behind cultivated land, across Quadra from the winery, a substantial home and landmark today. This ten-room family home has most of its downstairs taken up by a huge living room and dining room with sliding doors between, a tremendous kitchen (built originally as kitchen and pantry), and a den.

Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Borden, who own and operate a business nearby, are building a bath, utility room, and garage on the ground floor. The frame top-storey is bedroom and hobby space for one bachelor son remaining at home. Oddly enough, they have the same idea that has often occurred to the writer: for a small family, take away the top storey altogether, and have a stone bungalow.

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A GOOD BUSINESS man, Arthur Stewart also started the first bus line out to the Lake Hill area.

Another of Mr. Stewart's enterprises was a greenhouse business. He operated this concurrently with and in between building projects. A well-liked man, he maintained contact with those for whom he built long after business relationships were concluded, and used to take flowers around to all the people in "his" houses for years.

As his building enterprises centred more around the Tattersal area, Mr. Stewart decided he would like to live there himself, and made a three-cornered trade with his house in Lake Hill. This brought him a big frame house which had a German lifeboat standing on the front of the property. Here, he built the house in which he lived for the rest of his life. It is of stucco, but has, like most of Arthur Stewart's other houses, a beautifully balanced granite fireplace.

Probably one of the best known of the Stewart-built houses is that with the playground equipment in the garden, which most Victorians know as "Mrs. McGill's house." This was built for a couple named Hoffman (the wife was an artist), and is owned today by Mr. and Mrs. Hans Molholm from Denmark.

Arthur, and his younger brothers Hugh and David, stonemasons all, left the marks of their skill on many a public and private structure, both in their native Scotland, where their father and grandfather were stone builders before them, and in North America, Arthur was at one time foreman of an irrigation project in a place called Frog Tanks, Arizona.

House on a hilltop, this Victoria home provides a fine example of the stone mason's art. It has had an interesting history.

The Stewarts came from the same part of Ayrshire as the castle-building Dunsmuirs. Hugh was one of the builders employed at Hatley Park. David, the youngest, considered Victoria too slow, and made his headquarters a monumental works in Vancouver, from which he came to the Island to work from time to time. Among the major projects on which the Stewart brothers engaged were the addition to the old post office, the Empress Hotel, First United Church, Victoria College, and (to give it its full and correct title as the old builders always do) the Carnegie Library.

To David's family, the Vancouver war memorial in Victory Square is also the youngest brother's tombstone, for it was while cutting the stone for it that he broke his back, an injury from which he died six weeks later. Arthur went over from Victoria and finished the work on the monument.

Chorley House remained Miss Lilian Kitchin's home until her death in 1957. Her sister Kathleen had long since gone to California upon retirement from business.

A bachelor brother, a keen gardener, remained with his older sister until he pre-deceased her by 15 years. Miss Lilian remained a familiar figure in the district. A fine tennis player and an intrepid woman, with no apparent fear of living alone, she stayed in her dream home until the last.

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TODAY, the impressive stone house with its four acres of land is the home of P. H. "Bud" and Betty Bishop, and their children. The name "Chorley House" is their addition, and is a tribute by an only daughter to a dearly beloved father. Another addition which the Bishops are working on is a modernization of the kitchen. Already, they have removed a partition to make one fine room where there were two separate sections, and are building cabinetry in keeping with the spirit and finish of the house.

A second project is the finishing of the upstairs (said by some to have been the cause of the separation of the Kitchin sisters). The Bishops are agreed that the top storey is an excellent place for a playroom, and plan to start work on this as soon as possible. At present, in formal entertaining is carried on in a portion of the large basement, which has an access door from outside, over which hangs a sign "Bishop's Rest."

The garen, a hobby of both Miss Lillian and he brother, is another high priority subject on the Bishops' list of improvements to be made. In later years, it has become considerably neglected. Bud and Betty plan simply to restore the rock garden immediately around the house, and to leave the rest of the property wild. They have no intention of subdividing. To them, plenty of room for friends and family, plus one of the city's most inspiring views, is a dream come true. They intend to help the dream fulfil itself without undue interferenee.

Laurie Stewart, when told of the Bishops' plans, nodded in approval. I think his brother Arthur would have approved too, and so would the strong-spirited Miss Kitchin.

FORGOTTEN GRAVES

WHAT READER will remember there was once a little graveyard at what is now the corner of Johnson and Douglas Streets in old Victoria? Not many.

The British Colonist had a reference to it 99 years ago.

"It has lost its fence," the newspaper complained, "and the graves are only protected from the tread of the unthinking wayfarer by a slight wooden railing which marks the resting places of the pioneers of civilization in this colony.

"While we are caring for the spiritual and temporal wants of the living, let us not forget there is a duty we owe to the dead and provide a suitable plot of ground where their dust may remain undisturbed until the end of time."

The observation came a little late in the flourishing capital of Vancouver's Island, which was sprawling out in every direction.